

**Amendments to the Claims**

This listing of claims replaces prior versions:

Claims 1-4 (canceled)

Claim 5 (previously presented): A shift mechanism for an outboard motor mounted on a stern of a boat and having an internal combustion engine at its upper portion and a propeller at its lower portion that is powered by the engine to propel the boat, comprising:

an actuator installed in the outboard motor;

a shift rod installed in the outboard motor and connected to the actuator to be rotatable by the actuator;

a shifter clutch installed in the outboard motor and connected to the shift rod, the shifter clutch being movable by the shift rod from a neutral position to engage with at least one of a forward gear that allows the boat to be propelled in a forward direction and a reverse gear that allows the boat to be propelled in a reverse direction opposite to the forward direction;

a controller controlling the actuator to rotate the shift rod such that the shifter clutch moves from the neutral position to engage with one of the forward gear and the reverse gear, corresponding to an inputted shift instruction made by an operator, to effect shift; and

a shock mitigator mitigating shock generated during the shift,

wherein the shock mitigator comprises:

a torsion portion of the shift rod whose diameter is decreased to be flexible by twisting about its axis when stress is exerted,

and further wherein the torsion portion is positioned so that the midpoint along the axis of the shift rod is located within the torsion portion.

Claim 6 (previously presented): A shift mechanism for an outboard motor mounted on a stern of a boat and having an internal combustion engine at its upper portion and a propeller at its lower portion that is powered by the engine to propel the boat, comprising:

- an actuator installed in the outboard motor;

- a shift rod installed in the outboard motor and connected to the actuator to be rotatable by the actuator;

- a shifter clutch installed in the outboard motor and connected to the shift rod, the shifter clutch being movable by the shift rod from a neutral position to engage with at least one of a forward gear that allows the boat to be propelled in a forward direction and a reverse gear that allows the boat to be propelled in a reverse direction opposite to the forward direction;

- a controller controlling the actuator to rotate the shift rod such that the shifter clutch moves from the neutral position to engage with one of the forward gear and the reverse gear, corresponding to an inputted shift instruction made by an operator, to effect shift; and

- a shock mitigator mitigating shock generated during the shift,

- wherein the shift mechanism further includes:

- a reduction-gear mechanism connected to the actuator to reduce a rotation of the actuator and transmit it to the shift rod; and

- a case accommodating the actuator and the reduction-gear mechanism as a unit at a position immediately above the shift rod.

Claim 7 (original): A shift mechanism according to claim 6, further including:

- a rotational angle sensor generating a signal indicative of an angle of rotation of the shift rod; and

a shift lever position sensor generating a signal indicative of a position of a shift lever selected by the operator from among neutral, forward and reverse positions;

and the controller inputs signals of the rotational angle sensor and the shift lever position sensor and controls the actuator in such a manner that the detected angle of rotation of the shift rod becomes a desired angle of rotation necessary for the shifter clutch to move from the neutral position to engage with one of the forward gear and the reverse gear determined from the detected position of the shift lever to effect the shift.

Claim 8 (original): A shift mechanism according to claim 7, wherein the rotation angle sensor is accommodated in the case together with the actuator and the reduction-gear mechanism.

Claim 9 (previously presented): A shift mechanism for an outboard motor mounted on a stern of a boat and having an internal combustion engine at its upper portion and a propeller at its lower portion that is powered by the engine to propel the boat, comprising:

an actuator installed in the outboard motor;

a shift rod installed in the outboard motor and connected to the actuator to be rotatable by the actuator;

a shifter clutch installed in the outboard motor and connected to the shift rod, the shifter clutch being movable by the shift rod from a neutral position to engage with at least one of a forward gear that allows the boat to be propelled in a forward direction and a reverse gear that allows the boat to be propelled in a reverse direction opposite to the forward direction;

a controller controlling the actuator to rotate the shift rod such that the shifter clutch moves from the neutral position to engage with one of the forward gear and the reverse gear, corresponding to an inputted shift instruction made by an operator, to effect shift; and

a shock mitigator mitigating shock generated during the shift,

wherein the shift mechanism further includes:

a reduction-gear mechanism connected to the actuator to reduce a rotation of the actuator and transmit it to the shift rod; and

an emergency gear manually connectable to the reduction-gear mechanism to rotate the shift rod to effect shift.

Claim 10 (original): A shift mechanism according to claim 9, wherein the emergency gear is connected to a manually-operable grip that allows the emergency gear manually connected to the reduction-gear mechanism to rotate the shift rod to effect shift.

Claims 11-15 (canceled)